

INFORMATION ABOUT SITE SELECTION CONSIDERATIONS

It is critical to approach the site selection process for a new library very carefully. The ultimate success of any new library facility, if success is measured in usage of library services, will be determined to a large degree by where it is located. Of all the decisions that you as a library board make during the course of a library building project, more often than not the single most important decision will be the selection of the site upon which a new library will be constructed.

Public libraries are similar to other institutions which need to be used to be effective—where they are located is of prime importance.

As a successful private developer would say, the three most important ingredients of any project are: location, location, and location. A bank that is poorly located will not prosper, nor a food store or an apparel shop. Neither will a public library. Acquiring anything less than the best site will prove a false economy in terms of the life-cycle costs of the library. Anything less than the best site will also hinder public use of this important community resource.

Site selection tends to be one of the most emotionally charged, controversial aspects of a library building project. The selection process often ends up subjective, opportunistic and political. Yet, as stated above, site location will be one of the most important factors in the success of your library operation.

The selection criteria for sites for any new libraries should closely correspond to the criteria for locating an effective site for a retail business.

Site Selection Factors (Criteria)

It is recommended that the following (criteria) be considered when acquiring sites.

- 1. Accessibility*
- 2. Image/Visual Quality*
- 3. Visibility*
- 4. Demographic Patterns*
- 5. Site Capacity*
- 6. Neighborhood Compatibility*
- 7. Legal Matters*
- 8. Utilities Availability*
- 9. Physiography*

If several sites for a library are ranked equally high, or nearly so, in all of the above criteria, only then should site-related costs serve as a “tie-breaker” to finalize the selection of a library site. This kind of approach is recommended since site cost differences will be dwarfed by the operational cost effectiveness during the life of a library facility. This applies to a free site as well. The cost of construction and operations will be far greater than the cost of the land; therefore, the temptation to utilize a piece of property because it is a gift, or already owned by the county or city, should be resisted unless the site meets the other criteria and ranks high in comparison with sites that carry a price tag.

With these factors it is crucial to continually focus the site location issues on the basis of what location will consistently reinforce the most extensive use of the library. Most of the factors are simply ways of measuring different aspects of this key issue. A brief description of the site selection factors (criteria) follows.

- 1. Accessibility. The site should be easily accessible by automobile and within walking distance of some potential users. However, pedestrian access will always be secondary. Parking is a key element of automobile accessibility.*
- 2. Image/Visual Quality. The quality of the existing neighborhood surrounding the library needs to complement rather than detract from the library. The library site should be located in an area with a strong positive identity and image. Placing the library at the site should also be compatible with surrounding land uses, both existing and proposed.*
- 3. Visibility. A prominent location is required to attract a large number of people to the library. A highly visible site along a major street with easy accessibility is ideal. If the site (or surrounding sites) involves other buildings, the library should be able to be oriented in the portion of the site with highest visibility.*
- 4. Demographic Patterns. A library should be located where people can easily reach it and conduct other activities during the same trip. This means a place where people naturally converge. The site should be where the largest percentage of all people to be served will have access to the library frequently in the normal pursuit of their activities.*
- 5. Site Capacity. The site should be large enough to provide a sufficient square or rectangular library “footprint”; the required parking for users, staff and volunteers; future expansion; and the necessary allowances for*

setbacks, zoning requirements and suitable landscaping. The resulting building should look as if it belongs on the site, not forced on a plot of ground that is too small. For general planning purposes, the size of the site should be approximately four times larger than the proposed library facility. For example, a 10,000 square foot library will require a site that is about 40,000 square feet in size. A smaller site, to accommodate a two-level building, should not be considered. The "savings" in site cost will be quickly lost to much higher operational costs because there will have to be additional staff in order to adequately service two levels.

- 6. Neighborhood Compatibility. Will the library be a good neighbor? Is the neighborhood fully developed? If so, how will the library "fit"? If there is development in the future, will it be compatible with the mission and goals of the library?*
- 7. Legal Matters. The existence of easements or other restrictions can serve to minimize the buildable area of a site. A site owned by several persons/entities can be difficult to acquire. Zoning restrictions can hamper development, including parking and/or entrance/egress to and from the site.*
- 8. Utilities Availability. To avoid extra costs, the presence of electrical, water, gas, sewer, and other services should be in place now, or by the time construction is scheduled to start.*
- 9. Physiography. The suitability of the soil, the topography of the site and orientation are considerations. Orientation considerations include the avoidance of west sun on the books, or north entrances which offer little winter sunlight and exposure to the cold northern winds.*
- 10. Tie-Breaker Criteria. Site-Related Costs. If several sites are ranked equally, or nearly so, in all of the criteria, then site-related costs should serve as a "tie-breaker" to finalize the selection of a library site. Site-related costs should be compared on the basis of the following factors:*
 - a. Any acquisition costs.*
 - b. Demolition costs of any existing facilities on the site.*
 - c. Relocation costs of any existing business or residents currently on the site.*
 - d. Any unusual site development costs that may occur, such as from a site with underground utilities and/or water.*

- e. Any extra construction costs that will occur due to such things as poor soil conditions, limitations of the site such as underground versus above grade parking, or site configuration resulting in a more expensive building solution.*
- f. The cost of providing sufficient utility service to the site.*